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***Teionkwakhashion Tsi Niionkwariho:Ten / We Share Our Matters: Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of the Grand River* by RICK MONTURE**

U of Manitoba P, 2014 \$27.95

Reviewed by **ERIC RUSSELL**

Reading accounts of Joseph Brant (late eighteenth-century Mohawk spokesman and political leader) and Robbie Robertson (songwriter and guitarist for The Band) in the same book may seem unlikely, but such are the compelling critical surprises that characterize *We Share Our Matters* by Rick Monture (Mohawk). Monture's study is both nuanced and accessible: nuanced because the author follows the thread of traditional Haudenosaunee philosophy through a diverse set of conceptions of nationhood and accessible because the book should be valued by literary scholars, historians of North America, Indigenous Studies critics, and anyone interested in a relatively comprehensive portrayal of the politics and culture of a single Haudenosaunee reserve.

Monture accomplishes a lot with this book. First and foremost, he draws on a variety of Six Nations voices to plainly demonstrate the tradition of resistance and independence that has defined the Grand River community from the beginning. In doing so, Monture shows the importance and persistence of traditional Haudenosaunee cultural, spiritual, and political philosophy in Six Nations self-definition and negotiations of colonial oppression from the American Revolution up to the confrontation at Douglas Creek Estates. As Monture explains, "First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities . . . need to make adjustments to their world by employing those traditions that will sustain

them in the future creation of their new environments, whether they be physical, social, or political" (28). He goes on to demonstrate in five engaging chapters just how these adjustments have been made at Grand River. For Monture, a quality that emerges from Haudenosaunee philosophy is its universal value: "Through the process of reactivating traditional thinking, Indigenous intellectuals (and leaders) feel that other areas of critical inquiry could possibly benefit from some of the social and political ideas that emerge from a scholarly discourse centered on Indigenous philosophy" (22). As readers will discover, these "other areas of critical inquiry" include environmental ethics, education, and principles of democracy, to name a few.

For the most part, this book creates that sense of excitement that comes when we encounter truly innovative readings of intellectual productions. Monture shows that the writings and actions of figures like Brant (1743-1807), orator and chief Levi General/Deskaheh (1873-1925), poet Bernice Winslow (1902-1997), and professor and chief Jake Thomas (1922-1998) need to be carefully (re)considered in their respective historical contexts. He also makes it clear that these Grand River intellectuals should not be viewed solely in terms of their reactions to colonialism, for most of them articulate a conception of Haudenosaunee nationhood that precedes political relationships with Britain, Canada, or the United States. For example, whereas Brant is popularly viewed as an "acculturated" "Loyalist" and primary Haudenosaunee leader, Monture's revisionist approach acquaints readers with a more complex man whose "ideologies emerged from an ancient philosophical tradition that he and the hereditary Chiefs

and Clanmothers adapted to the changing circumstances around them” (34) and whose authority was always contingent upon the agency and wishes of the traditional leadership. In his reading of Winslow’s “Warriors of the Iroquois (Of the Silver Covenant Chain),” a poem about the Haudenosaunee upholding their commitment to alliance with Britain, Monture claims that despite the disparities between the causes for the outbreak of World War II and pre-contact conflict involving the Haudenosaunee, “The traditional concept of peaceful nations having to protect the balance that exists between right and wrongful human behaviour still remained. Winslow suggests that this was merely an ancient cycle in human history that the Great Law provides possible solutions for” (135).

Whereas many of the intellectuals Monture examines reflect deep respect for, and faith in, traditional Haudenosaunee philosophical principles like the Great Law and the Code of Handsome Lake (principles that are briefly but substantively described in Monture’s introduction), figures like Pauline Johnson and Robbie Robertson are viewed in part through the lens of the emotionally and socially debilitating effects colonialism has had on these artists’ conceptions of their Haudenosaunee identities. Much of the second chapter, “The Challenge to Haudenosaunee Nationhood: Performing Politics, Translating Culture,” is devoted to interpreting the consequences of Johnson’s poetry for the Grand River community and First Nations peoples at large. At times assimilationist, at times traditionally minded, and at times detrimentally committed to

Haudenosaunee exceptionalism, Johnson’s work, for Monture, is indicative of a First Nations woman mired in a difficult historical moment in which “the methods, concepts, and language of resistance, gender, and decolonization that exist today were unavailable to her” (104). And although Johnson was able to reach a wide audience, Monture argues that “she was far less effective in supporting the social and political struggles of her own community” (104). Two chapters later, Monture notes that before 1987, Robbie Robertson concealed his Mohawk heritage, so Monture is interested “in the consistent themes of loss, isolation, and questing that appear in [Robertson’s] most famous and enduring work from the 1960s, and which coincided with the emergence of the Red Power movement” (143). A song like “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down” thus potentially and interestingly becomes “a reference to the American Indian nations who had fought against the United States in their struggle to retain their homelands and way of life” (148).

The inclusive aura of this book is one of its best qualities; there really does seem to be something for everyone.

With *We Share Our Matters*, Monture takes his place in the long history of Grand River intellectual tradition. For all the Six Nations struggles Monture describes, his overarching tone is one of optimism: as he states in his acknowledgements, “This is a book that will always be ‘in progress’” (225).

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